

Professor Marilyn Halter
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Spring, 2012

Office Hours:
Th 3:30-5:00 226 Bay State Rd. Rm. 108
W 2-3:30 CURA, 10 Lenox St. Rm. 6

HI 475
American Consumer History

Thursday, 12:30-3:30 pm
226 Bay State Rd. Rm. 304

In this colloquium you will become acquainted with a relatively new field of study, the history of consumer society in modern America. Although we will briefly consider the roots of American commercialism, consumer culture was so transformed in the late nineteenth century that the primary focus of the course will be on the period between 1880 and the present. We will begin with an analysis of historians' debates about when consumer culture emerged, followed by an investigation of the differences between pre-industrial and industrial consumer society, and then move on to a more in-depth study of the "all-consuming" 20th century and beyond. Topics include the development and rise of national markets, product brands, department stores and shopping malls, advertising and commercial amusements as well as explorations that address the relationship of consumerism to gender, age, race, ethnicity, social class and religion. Throughout the course, we will also examine critiques of consumer culture and the history of consumer politics.

Required Books:

Lawrence Glickman, ed. *Consumer Society in American History: A Reader* (1999)
William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (1993)
Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Consumer Rites: The Buying and Selling of American Holidays* (1995)
John Kasson, *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century* (1978)
Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (2003)

Required books can be purchased at the BU Barnes and Noble Bookstore and are on reserve at Mugar Library. Assigned articles, book excerpts and other documents are available through:

- (1) our **Blackboard** website or
- (2) **Mugar Library electronic course reserves:** www.bu.edu/library/bi/reserve/index.html
Password: hi475 (all lowercase letters)

*These readings are listed on the syllabus with (reserve) written after them.

Course Requirements:

Class participation

The primary aims of the course are to teach you how to conduct close analytical readings of the assigned works as well as to familiarize you with the historical scholarship in this field. The colloquium format demands that you be well prepared for class. Be sure to complete all of the required reading before coming to class each week. Participation in discussion is essential and, thus, attendance is mandatory. If you absolutely must miss a class (serious illness or family emergency), you should get in touch with me (preferably in advance) to work out an acceptable way to make up the missed work. (Attendance and participation in class counts for 15% of your grade)

Papers

1. 10 Response Papers

2-page responses to the week's topic. These must be turned in at the beginning of class. No late papers will be accepted. Often you will be asked to respond to the week's readings. The exact response topic will be announced in class and posted on the website the week before it is due. (30%)

2. Each student will select a different book from a list I will provide and write a 4-6 page review of the book that emphasizes how it adds to our understanding of American consumer culture. Students will share their findings with the rest of the class in brief presentations. (20%)

3. A 10-page essay using secondary sources from our required reading to analyze primary source material that you have researched. Due in my mailbox by 3 pm on Wednesday, May 2 (35%)

You will receive further instructions in class concerning the book review and 10-page paper assignments.

Academic Integrity

Please review the CAS policy on plagiarism in the *Academic Conduct Code*:

<http://www.bu.edu/academics/resources/academic-conduct-code/>

It is essential to cite all sources in your writing, and, of course, to turn in only your own, original work.

CLASS SCHEDULE

Jan. 19 **Introduction: The Historical Study of Consumer Culture**

Jan. 26 **The Roots of American Consumer Society**

Readings:

- Glickman: 1-32 & 85-129
- Lawrence Glickman, "Buy for the Sake of the Slave": Abolitionism and the Origins of American Consumer Activism," *American Quarterly* Vol. 56, No. 4 (December, 2004): 889-912

Due: Response Paper #1

Feb. 2 **Advertising and Branding**

Readings:

- Jeffrey Steele, "Reduced to Images: American Indians in Nineteenth-Century Advertising," in Jennifer Scanlon, ed. *Gender and Consumer Culture Reader* (2000): 109-128 (reserve)
- Susan Strasser, Chapter 2 "The Name on the Label," in *Satisfaction Guaranteed: The Making of the American Mass Market* (1989): 29-57
- Roland Marchand, Chapter 1 "Apostles of Modernity" and Chapter 7 "The Great Parables" in *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity* (1985): 1-24 & 206-284 (reserve)
- Naomi Klein, "The Brand Expands: How the Logo Grabbed Center Stage," in *No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies* (2000): 27-62 (reserve)

Screening: *The Ad and the Ego* (Part I)

Due: Response Paper #2

Feb. 9 **The Rise of the Department Store**

Readings:

- Leach, *Land of Desire*
- Annie Marion MacLean, "Two Weeks in Department Stores," *The American Journal of Sociology* Vol. IV, No. 6 (May, 1899): 721-741
- "Rules and Regulations for the Siegel and Cooper Employees"

Due: Response Paper #3

Feb. 16 **Gender and Modernity**

Readings:

- Glickman: 207-240
- Elaine Abelson, , Chapter 1 "Urban Women and the Emergence of Shopping" and Chapter 6 "Shoplifting Ladies" in *When Ladies go A-Thieving: Middle-Class Shoplifters in the Victorian Department Store* (1998): 13-41 & 148-172
- Jennifer Scanlon: "Advertising Women: The J. Walter Thompson Company Women's Editorial Department," in Scanlon, ed. *Gender and Consumer Culture Reader* (2000) 201-225 (reserve)

- Kathy Peiss, "Making Faces: The Cosmetics Industry and the Cultural Construction of Gender, 1890-1930," in Vicki Ruiz and Ellen DuBois, eds. *Unequal Sisters: A Multicultural Reader in U.S. Women's History* (4th ed. 2007): 324-345

Screening: *The Kleptomaniac*

Due: Response Paper #4

Feb. 23 **The Buying and Selling of American Holidays**

Reading: Schmidt, *Consumer Rites*

Due: Response Paper #5

March 1 **Race, Ethnicity and the Consumer I**

Readings:

- Glickman: 170-206
- Wendy Woloson, "The Jew Broker in American Culture" in *In Hock: Pawning in America from Independence through the Great Depression* (2009): 21 – 53.
- Lawrence Glickman, "Inventing the American Standard of Living: Gender, Race and Working-Class Identity, 1880-1925," *Labor History* (Spring-Summer 1993): 221-234
- Stuart Cosgrove, "Zoot Suit and Style Warfare," in Jennifer Scanlon, ed. *Gender and Consumer Culture Reader* (2000): 342-354

March 8 **Commercialized Leisure**

Readings:

- Kasson, *Amusing the Million*;
- Janet Wasko, "Dissecting Disney's Worlds" in *Understanding Disney* (2001): 153-182

Watch (before class): *Coney Island* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UoKxgzeKcbU>

Due: Response Paper #6

March 15 **No Class** (Spring Break)

March 22 **Race, Ethnicity and the Consumer II**

Readings:

- Glickman: 241-273 & 316-325
- Jason Chambers, Chapter 2 "The Jackie Robinsons of Advertising and Selling," in *Madison Avenue and the Color Line: African Americans in the Advertising Industry* (2009): 58-112 (reserve)
- Kathy Newman, "The Forgotten Fifteen Million: Black Radio, the 'Negro Market' and the Civil Rights Movement," *Radical History Review* 76 (Winter 2000): 115-135
- Marilyn Halter, Chapter 7 "Recipe for Multiethnicity: The Mestizo Makeover" in *Shopping for Identity: The Marketing of Ethnicity* (2000): 170-191 (reserve)

Due: Response Paper #7

March 29 **Born to Buy**

Readings:

- Lisa Jacobson, Introduction and Chapter One, "'Big Sales from Little Folks': The Development of Juvenile Advertising" and Chapter 3, "Heroes of the New Consumer

Age: Imagining Boy Consumers,” in *Raising Consumers: Children and the American Mass Market in the Early Twentieth Century* (2004): 1-55 & 93-126 (reserve)

Screening: *Kids + Money*

Due: Response Paper #8

April 5 Consuming Place

Readings:

- Rachel St. John, “Selling the Border: Trading Land, Attracting Tourists, and Marketing American Consumption on the Baja California Border, 1900-1934,” in Alexis McCrossen, ed. *Land of Necessity: Consumer Culture in the United States-Mexico Borderlands* (2009) 113-142 (reserve)
- Karen L. Cox, “Branding Dixie: The Selling of the American South, 1890-1930,” in Anthony Stanonis, ed. *Dixie Emporium: Tourism, Foodways, and Consumer Culture in the American South* (2008): 50-68 (reserve)
- Marilyn Halter, “Tourists ‘R Us: Immigrants, Ethnic Tourism, and the Marketing of Metropolitan Boston,” in Jan Rath, ed. *Tourism, Ethnic Diversity and the City* (2006): 199-215

Due: Response Paper #9

April 12 The Politics of Mass Consumption

Reading:

- Cohen, *A Consumers’ Republic*

Due: Response Paper #10

April 19 The Abundance of Post-World War II America

Readings:

- Glickman: 298-315
- Susan Smulyan, Chapter 2 “The Magic of Nylon: The Struggle over Gender and Consumption,” in *Popular Ideologies: Mass Culture at Mid-Century* (2007): 41-71
- Andrew Hurley, “From Hash House to Family Restaurant: The Transformation of the Diner and Post-World War II Consumer Culture,” *Journal of American History* (March 1997): 1282-1308
- Alison J. Clarke, “Introduction” and “A Gift of Modernity” in *Tupperware: the Promise of Plastic in 1950s America* (1999): 1-7 & 56-77 (reserve)

Screening: *Tupperware!*

April 26 Shop ‘til You Drop: Rethinking Consumerism

Readings:

- Glickman: 341-372
- John Ryan and Alan Thein Durning, *Stuff: the Secret Lives of Everyday Things* (1997): 4-12 & 26-32
- Kalle Lasn, *Culture Jam* (1999): xi-xvii, 3-27, 72-83, 123-127 (reserve)

FINAL 10-PAGE PAPER DUE IN MY MAILBOX WEDNESDAY MAY 2 BY 3 P.M.